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Nov. 26, 2002  
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## NEWS RELEASE

*Note to editors: a schedule of exhibits of crèches from the University of Dayton follows. A variety of high-resolution digital images are available by calling (937) 229-3391.*

### **NATIVITY SETS FROM LARGEST COLLECTIONS IN THE U.S. CAN BE SEEN IN D.C., ON THE WEB AND AT THEIR HOME AT UD'S MARIAN LIBRARY**

DAYTON, Ohio — The country's largest collection of nativity sets goes on display Thanksgiving weekend, featuring many of its nearly 1,000 creative, diverse and nontraditional sets — also called crèches — representing cultures from 51 countries on six continents.

The University of Dayton's Marian Library-International Marian Research Institute houses the collection, which will open in Washington, D.C., Cincinnati, Dayton and on the Web at [www.udnativity.org](http://www.udnativity.org). A schedule of exhibits and locations is attached.

The Marian Library's collection of contemporary sets includes styles, settings and media as diverse and individualized as the heritage, vision and interpretation of the artists who created them. While all contain the central figures of Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus, visitors will also find polar bears, armadillos and flying camels as well as traditional sheep and ox. Shepherds and wise men have been joined by mariachi musicians, cooks and toy makers.

The sets vary in size, color scheme and complexity as well as "attitude" — while some are evocative of the solemn and holy setting of the Christmas event, others lighten the message with humor. Some incorporate earthen elements such as gravel, foliage, cork, bamboo and moss to create natural landscapes; others use household items such as bread, wax and clothespins to set the scene. While traditional manger scenes abound, the Christ child can also be found in forest, desert, mountain top, cave, a Swiss chalet and the center of a Mexican village. Settings range from shadow boxes to gourds and bread bowls.

As the figures and settings evolved with the influence of region, culture and time, whole new stories were interwoven with that of the birth of Christ, said the Rev. Johann G. Roten, S.M., director of the Marian Library-International Marian Research Institute. "They all have this powerful message, that Christ is born for all for us, at any given time, no matter color or culture. The Christ child is a magnet which attracts people from all walks of life. They all bring gifts of

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gratitude, visible and invisible, and converge on him who gives them faith, hope and love for God and each other.”

The Marian Library, which annually displays a sampling of its collection at several venues in Dayton, has added the John Paul II Cultural Center in D.C. and St. Peter in Chains Cathedral in Cincinnati to its exhibit venues this year. A total of 150 crèches will be on display at those locations and in Dayton at the Dayton Art Institute, St. John Gallery at the Bergamo Center and the Marian Library, which also houses the world’s largest and most comprehensive collection of printed materials on the Virgin Mary. All exhibits are free and open to the public.

Those who can’t visit the crèches in person can view a large selection of sets — from both the current exhibits and the permanent collection — on the Web at [www.udnativity.org](http://www.udnativity.org).

Of the sets currently on exhibit, featured crèches include three of the 30 at the Dayton Art Institute, Roten said. A set from Iceland — unusual because it is uncommon to find nativity sets in that country — is carved from part of a tree trunk. A set from Sardinia, an Italian island in the Mediterranean, is created from giant fennel, often difficult to find.

Another set, created earlier this year in Switzerland, is made of raku — a kind of earthenware originally developed in the 16th century for the Japanese tea ceremony. The characters are very contemporary, “almost nonfigurative,” Roten said. “The medium is very beautiful, but the scene extremely sober. The figures are very tall with fine lines, suggesting a spiritual quality as well as a sort of disembodiment in terms of the human condition.”

The Marian Library set out to amass its collection of varied cultural interpretations of the nativity in 1994. The undertaking, managed by the library’s Crèches International committee, is designed to promote the study and understanding of culture and religion, as well as the Christmas story itself, Roten said. With 988 sets on hand so far, the library has created a permanent display that is open year ’round and features a selection of complementary pieces that are rotated on a regular basis.

Crèche historians credit St. Francis of Assisi, so often depicted in illustration surrounded by animals, with using live animals and people to first recreate the birth of Jesus in a nativity scene in early 13th-century Italy, Roten said. Handcrafted replicas started to become popular in the 17th and 18th centuries, when they were promoted by the Capuchin, Jesuit and Franciscan orders in Italy, France, southern Germany and Austria. Missionaries brought the sets to other countries where, eventually, the figures and landscapes took on native ethnic and cultural features.

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For media interviews, contact the **Rev. Johann Roten, S.M.**, at (937) 229-4214 or via e-mail at [Johann.Roten@notes.udayton.edu](mailto:Johann.Roten@notes.udayton.edu).

**CRÈCHES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON MARIAN LIBRARY**  
**EXHIBIT SCHEDULE**

The University of Dayton Marian Library will exhibit 150 of its 988 crèches in five locations, including the John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C., and St. Peter in Chains Cathedral in Cincinnati during the 2002 holiday season.

Each venue will house 30 crèches, on display at the following locations, dates and times:

**Marian Library**

Seventh floor of Roesch Library  
University of Dayton  
300 College Park  
(937) 229-4214

On display: Nov. 25-Jan. 6

Hours: 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday (closed Christmas Day)

**St. John Gallery at the Bergamo Center**

4400 Shakertown Road  
Dayton  
(937) 320-5405

On display: Nov. 27-Jan. 5

Hours: Noon-4 p.m. Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday (closed Christmas Day)

**Dayton Art Institute**

456 Belmonte Park North  
Dayton  
(937) 223-5277

On display: Nov. 25-Jan. 6

Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily (including Christmas Day) with extended hours until 9 p.m. Thursdays

**John Paul II Cultural Center**

3900 Harewood Road, Northeast  
Washington, D.C.  
(202) 635-5400

On display: Nov. 15-Jan. 17

Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and Noon-5 p.m. Sundays. (Closed Mondays and Christmas Day)

**St. Peter in Chains Cathedral**

325 W. 8th Street  
Cincinnati  
(513) 421-5354

On display: Dec. 1-Jan. 5

Hours: 9 a.m.-2 p.m.